



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Peter Hood, or Peter.Hood@noaa.gov
727/824-5305, FAX 727/824-5308
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Proposed Rule for Vermilion Snapper Biological Reference Points, Stock Rebuilding Plan, and Harvest Reductions Measures Available for Public Review and Comment

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* (70 FR 11600, March 9, 2005) that, if approved, would implement the regulatory actions proposed in Amendment 23 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP). The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has submitted Amendment 23 for review by NMFS. NMFS announced the availability of Amendment 23 for public comment on February 24, 2005 (70 FR 9028).

NMFS is now requesting comments from the public regarding the proposed rule. The proposed rule would provide the regulatory authority to implement measures to reduce vermilion snapper harvest consistent with a plan to rebuild the vermilion snapper stock. Additionally, Amendment 23 would establish a new stock rebuilding plan, biological reference points, and stock status determination criteria for vermilion snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. Written comments on the proposed rule must be received on or before April 25, 2005. See the **Addresses** section at the end of this bulletin for information on where and how to submit comments.

Summary of Proposed Rule

Based on the results of the 2001 vermilion snapper stock assessment and updated indices of abundance, the allowable harvest for the first 4-year interval starting in 2005 is 1.475 million pounds. This

equates to a 25.5-percent reduction in harvest based on the 2003 predicted landings. Measures to accomplish this reduction are:

(1) An increase in the minimum size limit from 10 inches total length (TL) to 11 inches TL for recreationally and commercially caught vermilion snapper;

(2) a bag limit of 10 fish within the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit. This action, with the increase in minimum size limit, would achieve approximately a 21.5-percent reduction for the recreational fishery; and

(3) a closed commercial season from April 22 through May 31 each year. This action, with the increased size limit, would achieve a 26.3-percent harvest reduction for the commercial fishery.

Addresses

The FMP, which includes a Regulatory Impact Review, Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Social Impact Assessment, and a Fishery Impact Statement, is available from:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
The Commons at Rivergate
3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 1000
Tampa, Florida, 33619-2272
Phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-225-7015
e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Written copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th

Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701. Electronic copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the *Federal Register* website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

Comments regarding the proposed rule should be sent to Mr. Peter Hood at NMFS Southeast Regional Office at the address provided above. Comments may be submitted via fax to 727-824-5308 or by e-mail to 0648-AP19.Proposed@noaa.gov. For e-mail comments, include in the subject line the following identifier: 0648-AP19.

All comments on the proposed rule must be received before 5:00 p.m., eastern time, on April 25, 2005. All comments received by NMFS on the FMP or the proposed rule will be addressed in any final rule that is published to implement the actions proposed in the FMP.

This and other news releases are available on the Southeast Regional Office homepage at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. NMFS is an agency of the Department of Commerce.

NMFS is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NMFS provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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